

Los Angeles County
Museum of Art

Renaissance and
Mannerist Art

Because the works of art shown
in the galleries are sometimes
changed, certain works discussed
here may not be on view at the
present time.

Gallery Guide

The Renaissance reached its height in Florence and Rome at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. The most famous names associated with this High Renaissance are Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), and Raffaello Sanzio, called Raphael (1483–1520), who set the artistic standards for the era.

The painters of the High Renaissance freed themselves of the last traces of medieval art by perfecting the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, as they came to understand and employ mathematical principles such as perspective and proportion. They created balanced compositions in vibrant colors and shaped by convincing areas of shadows and highlights. Sculptors depicted bodies that seemed to be of real muscle and bone, capable of movement or arrested in motion.

The increased value placed on the achievements of the individual and an interest in naturalism during the Renaissance created a demand for portraits. Artists not only looked carefully at the world around them, they also studied the examples of the ancients for subject matter as well as for form. Examination of classical sources such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* provided narratives from pagan mythology.

By the early sixteenth century, artistic "perfection," as epitomized by the work of Raphael, became an end in itself. Treatises advocated adherence to a strict system of conventions. In reaction, several artists in the second decade of the sixteenth century began to push the elements of High Renaissance style to extremes. Partly inspired by the late work of Michelangelo, they purposely exaggerated or altered harmonious Renaissance forms to create an art that was eccentric and complex, such as the museum's painting by Rosso Fiorentino. This new style, *maniera* or Mannerism, combined hyper-elegant form and compositions with erudite (and now often mystifying) interpretations of subject matter. Mannerism first developed in Italy and later spread to the north, as can be seen in the museum's works by Joachim Wtewael and Hendrick Goltzius.



Andrea della Robbia

Italy, 1435–1525

The Virgin of the Annunciation and The Angel of the Annunciation

c. 1475–80

Lead-glazed terra-cotta relief

Virgin: height 65 in. (165.1 cm);

angel: height 62 in. (157.5 cm)

William Randolph Hearst Collection,

47.8.1a and 47.8.1b

Andrea della Robbia was the nephew of Luca della Robbia, who originated, in about 1430, the technique of coating terra-cotta sculpture with potter's glazes. This inexpensive, durable, and colorful material was well suited to the mass production of devotional images. The della Robbia produced a multitude of small-scale works for private individuals, as well as church altarpieces and architectural decoration. The popularity of glazed terra-cotta sculpture enabled the family to specialize in this medium well into the sixteenth century.

The two Annunciation figures are monumental in scale and display a grace typical of the art of the end of the fifteenth century. The Virgin Mary's lowered gaze and hand across her breast indicate that she receives the archangel Gabriel with pious humility. The angel's wide stance and bent legs suggest his recently arrested flight and the urgency of his momentous message, that Mary will give birth to the Son of God. The figures were probably made for a family chapel in the Palazzo Bardi in Florence, where they would have been placed at a distance from one other, perhaps flanking a door.

An elaborate altarpiece in the same technique can also be found in this gallery: *The Buonafede Nativity*, executed about 1520 by the brothers Benedetto and Santi Buglioni.



Master of the Fiesole Epiphany

Italy, active last quarter
of the fifteenth century

Christ on the Cross with Saints Mark, John the Baptist, Vincent Ferrer, and the Blessed Antoninus

c. 1485–90

Tempera on panel

72¾ x 79¾ in. (184.9 x 202.6 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.91.242

This altarpiece was painted for the chapel of the cloth-weavers' guild in San Marco, an important Dominican church in Florence. Eighty years later the work was described by Giorgio Vasari, the sixteenth-century painter and art chronicler, who attributed it to Cosimo Rosselli. The altarpiece was removed from San Marco in the late sixteenth century and changed owners several times until 1943, when it disappeared, to be rediscovered in 1991. Some modern scholars have questioned Vasari's attribution, assigning the work to the so-called Master of the Fiesole Epiphany, a follower of Domenico Ghirlandaio.

Christ is depicted on the cross, floating above the chalice in which some of his blood has been gathered during his crucifixion. The unusual depiction of a crowned Christ in an elaborate robe was based on a famous painted wood sculpture, venerated by the cloth-weavers' guild, located in the

cathedral in Lucca, the guild's city of origin. That image, in turn, is thought to be based on a description of the Christ of the Apocalypse recorded in the book of Revelation.

Surrounded by a host of angels, Christ is attended by four saints, each of whom is relevant to the context of the commission. At the lower left is John the Baptist, patron saint of Florence, who kneels in front of Vincent Ferrer, one of the most important Dominican saints. Standing on the right is the Blessed Antoninus Pierozzi, the first prior of the monastery of San Marco and later archbishop of Florence. The rays of light surrounding his head denote beatification; after he was canonized in 1523 a conventional halo was added to the painting. Kneeling on the right is Mark the Evangelist, the saint to whom the church is dedicated. The supernatural scene is made convincing by the realistic rendering of bodies and faces and the beautifully atmospheric Tuscan river landscape in the distance.



Fra Bartolommeo

Italy, 1472–1517

Holy Family

c. 1497

Oil on canvas

59 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 35 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. (151 x 91.3 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.73.83

Known in his youth as Baccio della Porta, Bartolommeo di Paolo was born in Florence and studied first with Cosimo Rosselli. He absorbed the innovations of his contemporaries Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo and soon surpassed his teacher in assimilating the new trends in art at the turn of the century. Bartolommeo's art developed from a thorough understanding of anatomical structure and optical phenomena combined with an intention to depict nature in a perfected state. About 1500 the artist abandoned painting and entered the Dominican monastery in Prato (*fra* means "brother"), but by 1504 he had returned to Florence and opened a studio in the monastery of San Marco, where he was excused from many of his monastic duties so that he could paint.

While in keeping with the harmony and grace of the High Renaissance style, the *Holy Family* also exhibits some unique features. The unusual vertical format and the fact that the painting is on canvas rather than wood have given rise to the suggestion that the work was made as a banner for a procession honoring the Virgin. She is clearly the focus of the composition and is presented as an ideal of spiritual beauty reflected in human form. Standing majestically against the open sky and distant horizon, she is depicted with one hand on her heart and the other placed lovingly on the Christ Child's head. The aged Joseph, his features obscured in shadow, supports the child from behind.

In the distance is a scene of Saint Dominic greeting Saint Francis of Assisi in front of a Dominican monastery. For the sixteenth-century viewer this episode would have called to mind Dominic's vision in which the Madonna interceded with her son for the two friars in their fight against the vices of pride, luxury, and corruption.



Rosso Fiorentino

Italy, 1495–1540

The Virgin, the Christ Child, Saint Elizabeth, the Young Saint John, and Two Angels

c. 1521

Oil on panel

63½ x 47 in. (161.3 x 119.4 cm)

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Herbert T. Kalmus, 54.6

Rosso Fiorentino was born Giovanni Battista di Jacopo di Gasparre in Florence, studied for a time under Andrea del Sarto, and was called to France in 1530 to be court painter to King Francis I at Fontainebleau. Rosso was one of the first artists to turn away from the tenets of the High Renaissance, deliberately avoiding balanced compositions, natural poses and expressions, and harmonious forms. This picture presents a striking contrast to other works in this gallery and reflects the beginnings of the Mannerist style in Italy.

The meaning of the painting remains uncertain. The Madonna and Child are represented on the right, with Mary looking into the face of an old crone, who may be her cousin Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, presumably the boy languishing at her feet. Because the old woman holds a book, an attribute of Anne, mother of the Virgin, she has been identified alternatively as this saint. She may also be the prophetess Anna, who recognized Jesus's divinity upon his presentation in the temple. Rosso's inclusion of the frenzied angels clutching each

other with clawlike hands lends an air of impending doom to the scene.

For unknown reasons the picture was left unfinished, which accounts for the pale, thin layers of paint. The stable, triangular grouping of figures so favored by Renaissance artists here falls apart at the center. Space is limited to a very narrow area, crowding the figures against the picture plane. The figures are angular and distorted and do not share the same proportions. All these features demonstrate how different was the expression of the early Mannerist artists from the classically structured art of their predecessors.



Paris Bordone

Italy, 1500–1571

Madonna and Child with Saints Jerome and Francis

c. 1525

Oil on panel

29½ x 38½ in. (74.9 x 97.8 cm)

Paul Rodman Mabury Collection, 39.12.1

Paris Bordone was born in Treviso and at the age of eight was sent to Venice, where he came under the influence of the great Venetian masters Giorgione and Titian. In 1538 he went to France to work for King Francis I and traveled also to Augsburg and Milan. Bordone was one of the most important artists of the Venetian school in the sixteenth century.

In this painting the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child are flanked by Saint Jerome, on the left, and Saint Francis of Assisi. This type of image is known as a *sacra conversazione* or "sacred conversation," an ideal-

ized gathering of the Madonna and Child with several saints. While such groups are usually depicted in an architectural setting, Bordone placed his relaxed, naturally posed figures in a verdant landscape that resembles the terrain outside Venice. Bordone's soft, hazy colors and his use of oil glazes to soften outlines are typical of the painterly Venetian style, which stands in contrast to the solid forms and sharp contours of the Florentines, as seen in the work of Fra Bartolommeo.



Titian

Italy, c. 1489–1576

Portrait of Giacomo Dolfin

c. 1531

Oil on canvas

41 $\frac{5}{16}$ x 35 $\frac{13}{16}$ in. (104.9 x 91 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.81.24

Titian was born Tiziano Vecellio in Pieve di Cadore and at the age of nine was sent to nearby Venice, where he studied painting under Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione. He soon became known as Europe's leading colorist and was one of the most sought-after portraitists on the continent, so much so that after the early 1530s he rarely painted anyone who was not of noble birth. The *Portrait of Giacomo Dolfin* is one of Titian's last images of a sitter who was not widely known.

Dolfin is identified by the document he holds in his hand. He served in a number of legal and administrative positions in Venice

and its dependent towns. Dressed in sumptuously painted burgundy velvet, he stares down at us and presents us with his credentials. Titian creates a stable monumentality by depicting the figure as a pyramidal form against a neutral background. The gentle play of light over Dolfin's face brings out the forceful features of a man who seems to have little time for frivolity. Through masterful handling of paint and careful arrangement of form, Titian easily conveys Dolfin's attitude of solemn self-assurance.

The Venetian tradition of formal portraiture was continued by Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti), whose *Portrait of a Venetian Senator* of about 1560 hangs nearby.



Giorgio Vasari

Italy, 1511–1574

Holy Family with Saint Francis in a Landscape

1542

Oil on canvas

72 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 49 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (184.2 x 125.1 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.87.87

Giorgio Vasari is best known as the first historian of Italian art, publishing his *Lives of the Artists* in 1550, with a revised edition in 1568. The book is still an important source of information on Renaissance artists. Vasari, born in Arezzo and trained in the circle of Andrea del Sarto, was himself a prolific painter who traveled widely, working in Rome, Bologna, Venice, and Naples. Between 1550 and 1570 he worked on a number of projects

for the grand duke of Tuscany, Cosimo de' Medici, whose bust by Giovanni dell'Opera is on view in this gallery.

The *Holy Family* was probably painted for the Florentine banker Francesco Leoni, who lived in Venice and was host to Vasari when he visited there. The elongated, twisting body of the Christ Child and the Virgin's elegant hands and elaborately braided hair place the image within the Mannerist style, although Vasari borrowed from High Renaissance sources as well. The monumental grouping of the Madonna, Child, and Joseph is derived from a painting by Raphael, while the individual figures are reminiscent, in form and proportion, of the work of Vasari's idol, Michelangelo; Joseph in particular is similar to many of Michelangelo's figures on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Despite his use of borrowed motifs, however, Vasari rises above pastiche to create a devotional image that is moving and personal.



Paolo Veronese

Italy, 1528–1588

**Allegory of Navigation
with a Cross-Staff: Averroës**
and **Allegory of Navigation
with an Astrolabe: Ptolemy**

1557

Oil on canvas

80 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 46 in. (204.3 x 116.8 cm)

and 80 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 46 in. (204.5 x 116.8 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.74.99.2 and M.74.99.1

Paolo Caliari, called Veronese after the city of his birth, Verona, had his early artistic training there and traveled to Venice sometime between 1545 and 1550. Inspired by the rich color of Titian's work, Veronese became, with Tintoretto, one of the great painters of decorative programs for palaces and churches in Venice in the sixteenth century.

These two allegories were intended for the Libreria di San Marco, the library of the Venetian basilica, as part of a decorative scheme executed by Veronese and several other artists. The figures have been identified as the astronomers Ptolemy and Averroës. Ptolemy, a resident of Alexandria in the second century A.D., holds an astrolabe, an instrument invented by the ancient Greeks for measuring the altitude of a heavenly body. The younger man, the Spanish-Arab philosopher and physician Averroës (1126–1198), carries a cross-staff, a graduated pole with a sliding crosspiece, invented in the Renaissance as a more portable substitute for the astrolabe.

The works are forceful and imposing in their monumentality. Veronese casts his well-muscled figures in the powerfully twisted poses that typify the Mannerist style and the late work of Michelangelo. He also pays homage to antiquity by including architectural and sculptural references to ancient civilization, particularly the massive Corinthian capital and pediment sculpture.



Archangel Raphael

Italy, Naples, c. 1600
Polychromed and gilded wood
Height 70 in. (177.8 cm)
Gift of Anna Bing Arnold, M.77.52

At the end of the sixteenth century, Naples was under the rule of the Spanish Hapsburgs, who fostered a taste for elaborate painted and gilded wood sculpture. An unknown Neapolitan sculptor created this image of the archangel Raphael, the guardian of travelers, pilgrims, and the young; in Naples he was particularly venerated as the protector of sailors and travelers by sea.

There is an indentation in the base of this sculpture indicating that the angel was accompanied by another figure, most likely the young Tobias. According to the Old Testament apocryphal book of Tobit, Tobias was sent by his blind father to conduct business in a distant city. The archangel Raphael, in the guise of a mortal man, was sent by God to assist the youth through various tribulations, and see him safely home with a cure for his father's blindness. In Renaissance Italy, where sons often traveled on family business, a representation of Tobias and the Angel was often commissioned as a pledge or thanksgiving for a son's

safe return. The angel looks down with benevolence to where the figure of Tobias would be; his other hand points heavenward. His bent knee and backward-flowing draperies suggest a forward motion.

The angel is in an excellent state of preservation, with no indication that any overpainting has been applied to freshen the colors. To create the brocade pattern of the tunic, the unknown artist painted over the gilded surface and then scratched through the paint to reveal the gold leaf below. The artist combined graceful Mannerist proportions and sumptuous details to create a convincing representation of a celestial being.



El Greco

Greece, active Italy and Spain, 1541–1614

The Apostle Saint Andrew

c. 1600
Oil on canvas
28 x 21½ in. (71.1 x 54.6 cm)
Los Angeles County Fund, 52.16

El Greco was born Domenikos Theotokopoulos on the Greek island of Crete and possibly worked as a painter of icons before traveling to Venice, where he is said to have studied with Titian and was deeply touched by Venetian art. He visited Rome in 1570, where he saw the work of Michelangelo, whose sculpture he admired but whose painting he criticized. Arriving in

Spain, El Greco (meaning “the Greek”) worked first for King Philip II at the royal complex of the Escorial outside Madrid; in 1577 he settled in Toledo, where he lived for the rest of his life, primarily painting portraits and religious scenes commissioned by the Catholic Church. Working during the Mannerist period, El Greco is usually associated with that style; however, his attenuated, spiritually charged figures are in a class by themselves.

The Apostle Saint Andrew is from a series of thirteen half-length images of Christ and the twelve apostles, known as an *apostolado*, that hung originally in the church of Almadrones in Guadalajara, Spain. Andrew, the brother of Saint Peter, is identified by the diagonal beam of the X-shaped cross on which he was crucified. El Greco’s roots in late Byzantine art are reflected by the saint’s intense, iconlike visage, while the influence of Venetian art is apparent in the rich coloration, soft outlines, and loose brushwork.



Joachim Anthonisz Wtewael

Holland, 1566–1638

Lot and His Daughters

c. 1595

Oil on canvas

64 x 81 in. (162.6 x 205.7 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.81.53

By the end of the sixteenth century the Mannerism that had begun in Italy in the 1520s had been taken up with enthusiasm in the Netherlands. The principal exponent of the style in the city of Utrecht was Joachim Wtewael, who had learned of Mannerism in his youth while visiting Italy and France.

Lot and His Daughters is a subject Wtewael treated on several occasions. The image is based on a story from Genesis 19:30–38: Lot’s daughters, assuming their father to be the last man on earth after God’s destruction of Sodom, intoxicated and seduced him in order to perpetuate the human race. Wtewael shows the figures erotically intertwined and includes naturalistic details such as the basket of fruit in the foreground and the bread, butter, and cheese at the left. To the sixteenth-century eye these still-life elements referred to a much-debated matter: could Lot and his daughters be forgiven their transgression? The bread, wine, and grapes refer to salvation through the Eucharist, while the butter and cheese recall a Dutch proverb, “Butter with cheese is a devilish feast,” referring to an excess of sensual pleasures. These layers of meaning were intentional, providing the viewer with a moral dilemma that required a personal resolution.



Hendrick Goltzius

Holland, 1558–1617

Jupiter and Danaë

1603

Oil on canvas

68¼ x 78¾ in. (173.4 x 200 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,
M.84.191

Hendrick Goltzius was born in Mühlbracht, on the German border, and began his artistic career by studying glass painting with his father. He went on to learn engraving under Dirk Volkertsz Coornhert, becoming Europe's premier print-maker and draftsman by the end of the sixteenth century. Goltzius is best known for engraving many of the compositions of the Flemish artist Bartholomeus Spranger, whose works were influenced by the Mannerism Spranger had absorbed in Italy. In the 1580s Goltzius joined with other artists to form the Haarlem Academy, an association of northern Mannerists who intended to rival the Italians. The Haarlem style was introduced to the rest of Europe through Goltzius's prints. Around 1600 the artist turned his attention to oil painting and became influential in the subsequent development of history painting in the Netherlands.

Jupiter and Danaë is one of his largest and most important surviving paintings. The story is told in book 4 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of the beautiful Danaë, whose father locked her in a high tower after learning from the Delphic oracle that Danaë's son would kill him. The imprisoned Danaë is visited by the god Jupiter in the form of a shower of gold. From this

union is born the hero Perseus, who accidentally kills his grandfather, thus fulfilling the prophecy.

Goltzius depicts a sumptuous setting in which playful putti pull back the bed drapes to reveal the young woman's innocent beauty to the viewer. The crystal goblet at her bedside symbolizes her purity, which is about to be compromised by Jupiter. In the fourteenth century Danaë's miraculous impregnation was likened to that of the Virgin Mary. The gold droplets turning to coins as they fall and the sly servant who catches them in her cup, however, suggest a much different interpretation, one that was first put forth in the sixteenth century. Here Goltzius leaves it to the viewer to reconcile the reading that Danaë was a passive recipient of divine intervention with the more "modern" view that her love was, in effect, purchased.

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